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ATTORNEY'S DOCKET NUMBER
109426

**TRANSMITTAL LETTER TO THE
UNITED STATES
DESIGNATED/ELECTED OFFICE
(DO/EO/US) CONCERNING A FILING
UNDER 35 U.S.C. 371**

U.S. APPLICATION NO.
(if known, sec 37 C.F.R.1.5)

09/830879

INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO.
PCT/JP00/06189

INTERNATIONAL FILING DATE
September 11, 2000

PRIORITY DATE CLAIMED
September 9, 1999

TITLE OF INVENTION
INTERNAL ELECTRODE TYPE PLASMA PROCESSING APPARATUS AND PLASMA PROCESSING METHOD

APPLICANTS FOR DO/EO/US
Masashi UEDA; Tomoko TAKAGI

Applicant herewith submits to the United States Designated/Elected Office (DO/EO/US) the following items and other information:

1. ☒ This is a **FIRST** submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371.
2. ☐ This is a **SECOND** or **SUBSEQUENT** submission of items concerning a filing under 35 U.S.C. 371.
3. ☒ This express request to begin national examination procedures (35 U.S.C. 371(f)) at any time rather than delay examination until the expiration of the applicable time limit set in 35 U.S.C. 371(b) and PCT Articles 22 and 39(1).
4. ☐ A proper Demand for International Preliminary Examination was made by the 19th month from the earliest claimed priority date.
5. ☒ A copy of the International Application as filed (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2))
 - a. ☐ is transmitted herewith (required only if not transmitted by the International Bureau).
 - b. ☒ has been transmitted by the International Bureau.
 - c. ☐ is not required, as the application was filed in the United States Receiving Office (RO/US)
6. ☒ A translation of the International Application into English (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(2)).
7. ☐ Amendments to the claims of the International Application under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3))
 - a. ☐ are transmitted herewith (required only if not transmitted by the International Bureau).
 - b. ☐ have been transmitted by the International Bureau.
 - c. ☐ have not been made; however, the time limit for making such amendments has NOT expired.
 - d. ☐ have not been made and will not be made.
8. ☐ A translation of the amendments to the claims under PCT Article 19 (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(3)).
9. ☒ An oath or declaration of the inventors (35 U.S.C. 371(c)(4)).
10. ☐ A translation of the annexes to the International Preliminary Examination Report under PCT Article 36 (35 U.S.C. 371 (c)(5)).

Items 11. to 16. below concern other document(s) or information included:

11. ☒ An Information Disclosure Statement under 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98.
12. ☒ An assignment document for recording. A separate cover sheet in compliance with 37 CFR 3.28 and 3.31 is included.
13. ☐ A FIRST preliminary amendment.
- ☐ A SECOND or SUBSEQUENT preliminary amendment.
14. ☐ A substitute specification.
15. ☐ Entitlement to small entity status is hereby asserted.
16. ☐ Other items or information:

U.S. APPLICATION NO. (if known) **097830879**
C.F.R. 1.5)

INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION NO.
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109426

17. ☒ The following fees are submitted:

Basic National fee (37 CFR 1.492(a)(1)-(5)):

Search Report has been prepared by the EPO or JPO\$860.00

International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO
(37 CFR 1.482)\$690.00

No international preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO
(37 CFR 1.482) but international search fee paid to USPTO
(37 CFR 1.445(a)(2))\$710.00

Neither international preliminary examination fee (37 CFR
1.482) nor international search fee (37 CFR 1.445(a)(2))
paid to USPTO\$1,000.00

International preliminary examination fee paid to USPTO
(37 CFR 1.482) and all claims satisfied provisions of PCT
Article 33(2)-(4)\$ 100.00

ENTER APPROPRIATE BASIC FEE AMOUNT =

\$860.00

Surcharge of \$130.00 for furnishing the oath or declaration later than
☐ 20 ☐ 30 months from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR
1.492(e)).

\$

Claims	Number Filed	Number Extra	Rate
Total Claims	18 - 20 =	0	X \$ 18.00
Independent Claims	6 - 3 =	3	X \$ 80.00
Multiple dependent claim(s)(if applicable)			+ \$270.00

\$

\$240.00

\$

TOTAL OF ABOVE CALCULATIONS =

\$1,100.00

Reduction by 1/2 for filing by small entity, if applicable.

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\$

SUBTOTAL =

\$

Processing fee of \$130.00 for furnishing the English translation later
than ☐ 20 ☐ 30 month from the earliest claimed priority date (37 CFR
1.492(f)).

+

\$

TOTAL NATIONAL FEE =

\$1,100

Amount to be
refunded

\$

Charged

\$

- a. ☒ Check No. 118677 in the amount of \$1,100 to cover the above fees is enclosed.
b. ☐ Please charge my Deposit Account No. _____ in the amount of \$_____ to cover the above fees. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.
c. ☒ The Director is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required, or credit any overpayment, to Deposit Account No. 15-0461. A duplicate copy of this sheet is enclosed.

NOTE: Where an appropriate time limit under 37 CFR 1.494 or 1.495 has not been met, a petition to revive (37 CFR 1.137(a) or (b)) must be filed and granted to restore the application to pending status.

SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:

OLIFF & BERRIDGE, PLC
P.O. Box 19928
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NAME: James A. Oliff
REGISTRATION NUMBER: 27,075

NAME: Joel S. Armstrong
REGISTRATION NUMBER: 36,430

U.S. APPLICATION NO. (if known, see 37
C.F.R. 1.5) 097830879

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(37 CFR 1.482) and all claims satisfied provisions of PCT
Article 33(2)-(4) \$ 100.00

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Reduction by 1/2 for filing by small entity, if applicable.

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NAME: James A. Oliff
REGISTRATION NUMBER: 27,075

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DESCRIPTION

INTERNAL ELECTRODE TYPE PLASMA PROCESSING APPARATUS AND PLASMA PROCESSING METHOD

Technical Field

The present invention relates to an internal electrode type plasma processing apparatus and plasma processing method, more particularly, relates to a plasma processing apparatus and plasma processing method provided with an inductive coupling type electrode suited for deposition of an amorphous silicon thin film used for solar cells or thin film transistors and the like on a large-area substrate.

Background Art

The electrodes of internal electrode type plasma CVD apparatuses have conventionally been of the parallel-plate type or the inductive coupling type.

If using the parallel-plate type electrode, when trying to raise frequency of a high frequency power in order to increase a film deposition rate and improve film characteristics, the problem arises that the electric discharge becomes non-uniform. This is caused by the occurrence of a standing wave on the electrode plate resulting on non-uniform distribution of plasma density and by the production of plasma at undesirable locations due to the voltage created by the feedback current to the ground. Further, as the substrate holder is made to function as a ground

electrode, the backing plate for the substrate becomes required and there is the difficulty of maintaining the clearance between the backing plate and substrate uniform when the size of the electrode plate is increased so as to form a film on a large-area substrate. Also, handling of the backing plate becomes difficult generally. Therefore, a parallel-plate type electrode is not well suited to the deposition of a film on a large-area substrate.

As opposed to the above parallel-plate type electrode, an inductive coupling type electrode is free from the above problems. Accordingly, the inductive coupling type electrode is well suited to the deposition of a film on a large-area substrate when used in an internal electrode type plasma CVD apparatus, for example.

As an internal electrode type plasma CVD apparatus using an inductive coupling type electrode, for depositing an amorphous silicon thin film on a large-area substrate to form a solar cell etc, there is the apparatus disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication (Kokai) No. 4-236781, for example. In this plasma CVD apparatus, the electrode for discharge is formed by a flat coil having a ladder-like structure which is arranged parallel to the substrate. The ladder-like flat coil is formed by a conductive wire. The source gas is introduced from a reaction gas introduction pipe provided at a single location of the reactor, while the inside of the reactor is evacuated through an evacuation pipe provided at a single location of the reactor. This flat coil increases the intensity of the electromagnetic field and improves the uniformity of the field. Further, as a similar conventional plasma CVD apparatus, there may be the apparatus disclosed in

Japanese Patent No. 2785442. In this plasma CVD apparatus, as the electrode arranged facing the substrate, a flat coil electrode formed by a single conductive wire bent multiple times to form a zigzag configuration is used. A high frequency power is supplied from a high frequency generator to the two ends of this electrode.

Concerning the above inductive coupling type electrode, the ladder-shaped flat coil electrode according to Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication (Kokai) No. 4-236781 does not have a uniform current flowing at each rung of the ladder configuration and therefore does not give a uniform distribution of the electromagnetic field, so has the problem of the inability to deposit a uniform film on the large-area substrate.

The ladder-shaped flat coil electrode is a distributed constant circuit in view of an electric circuit. A current flowing at each section in the distributed constant circuit can not be calculated simply from resistance and path length of the circuit. In the ladder type electrode, an impedance of each ladder rung relative to other ladder rungs and a geometrical relation between each ladder rung and a feeding point is related to the magnitude of Poynting vector at each ladder rung. Experimentally, the phenomenon that most of the current flows at the ladder rung near the feeding point is observed.

Further, since the zigzag flat coil electrode according to Japanese Patent No. 2785442 is produced by bending a single long conductive wire and the high frequency power is supplied from one end, the power cannot be fed efficiently. Further, while

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effort is made in the design to prevent the generation of a standing wave as much as possible, it is impossible to prevent the generation of a standing wave at undesirable locations due to the configuration of the electrode. Therefore, the film deposition is disturbed. That is, an unintentional standing wave is produced at the electrode, and this standing wave disturbs the distribution of plasma and results in poor uniformity of film deposition.

Then, in the plasma CVD apparatus and the like of the internal electrode type and inductive coupling type, it is desired to generate the plasma around the electrode by positively producing and utilizing the standing wave along the electrode arranged in the processing chamber. The plasma generated around the electrode receives energy for plasma generation from the antinode portion of the standing wave. Accordingly, it is preferred to control the standing wave generated along the electrode and the number or the positions of the antinodes to be formed in a desirable situation. Thereby, the standing wave can be actively used in a controllable state so that the antinodes are produced at desirable positions along the electrode, and therefore it is possible to skillfully control a distribution of plasma and to deposit a film on a large-area substrate with a good situation.

Further, as a general discussion, when proposing an electrode configuration in the internal electrode type plasma processing apparatus, concerning the standing wave positively produced on the electrode, the relationship between the frequency of the high frequency power supplied to the electrode and plasma

produced around the electrode in the reactor due to the high frequency power sometimes cannot be ignored. Further, the plasma exited around the electrode due to the standing wave formed on the electrode, specifically the plasma parameters, have a major effect on the standing wave and sometimes make it necessary to reevaluate the design parameters of the electrode configuration. In this case, it is required that sufficient consideration be given to the plasma parameters when designing the electrode.

The objective of the present invention is to solve the above problems, positively utilize a standing wave in a controllable state to achieve a good uniformity of the plasma density, realize a configuration of the electrode considering the plasma parameters around the electrode, and to provide an internal electrode type plasma processing apparatus and plasma processing method which is suitable for deposition of a film on a large-area substrate for a solar cell etc.

Disclosure of Invention

The internal electrode type plasma processing apparatus and method according to the present invention are configured so as to achieve the above objects.

The plasma processing apparatus of the present invention is the apparatus of the internal electrode type provided with an inductive coupling type electrode arranged in a vacuum processing chamber. The above electrode is formed so that the total length thereof is substantially equal to an excitation wavelength, and one end of the electrode is grounded and another

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Each part of the standing wave, which are produced on the halves of the electrode, are mutually intensified to supply the electromagnetic energy to the surrounding space of the electrode, and the plasma of uniform density is generated in the surrounding space of the electrode. When generating the plasma within the processing chamber, active use of the standing wave positively generated on the electrode is performed.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, the electrode is formed to be U-shaped by bending it back at the central portion, and each of the half portions of the electrode corresponds to a straight portion, and both half portions are arranged in parallel.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, the length of the half portion of the electrode is substantially equal to a half of the wavelength of the supplied high frequency power.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, a plurality of the electrodes are arranged to make a stratified structure comprising a plurality of layers within the vacuum processing chamber, a plurality of film depositing regions are produced

using the space between the electrodes included in the plurality of layers, and film deposition on a substrate is performed in each of the plurality of film depositing regions. This structure can increase a processing efficiency of substrates.

The plasma processing apparatus of the present invention is the apparatus of an internal electrode type, which is provided with an inductive coupling type electrode in a vacuum processing chamber, and the electrode is formed so that a total length of the electrode is determined to natural number times of a half of an excitation wavelength, one end of the electrode is grounded and another end thereof is connected to a high frequency power source, and standing waves are produced along the electrode when the high frequency power source supplies a high frequency power to the electrode, and further a node of the standing waves produced along the electrode is formed at a central portion of the electrode, and at least one antinode of the standing waves is formed at half portions of the electrode, which exist at both sides of a center point.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, the electrode is formed to be U-shaped by bending it back at the central portion, and each of the half portions of the electrode is a straight portion, both of the half portions are arranged in parallel, and the node of the standing wave is consistent with a bending back point.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, a plurality of electrodes are arranged to make a stratified structure comprising a plurality of layers within the vacuum processing chamber, a

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plurality of film depositing regions are produced using the space between the electrodes included in the plurality of layers, and film deposition on a substrate is performed in each of the plurality of film depositing regions.

The plasma processing apparatus of the present invention comprises a plurality of electrodes of an inductive coupling type in a vacuum processing chamber, and each of the plurality of electrodes is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion to be U-shaped, the straight portions formed by the bending back are made parallel and are arranged to be in one plane, and further one end of each of the electrodes is grounded and another end thereof is connected to a high frequency power source. Further, the plurality of electrodes positioned parallel to each other are placed so that a straight portion of a power supplying side is adjacent to a straight portion of a grounded side, and high frequency powers respectively supplied into the ends of the straight portions of power supplying side for the plurality of electrodes are in phase.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, the length of each straight portion formed by bending back the plurality of electrodes is determined to produce an antinode of a standing wave on the straight portion.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, plural electrodes arranged to be in one plane is configured as an electrode array, a plurality of the electrode arrays are placed as a stratified structure within the vacuum processing chamber, a plurality of film depositing regions are produced using a space between said

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The plasma processing apparatus of the present invention comprises an electrode of an inductive coupling type in a vacuum processing chamber and the electrode is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion to be U-shaped. Further, a plasma discharge is produced around the electrode by supplying a high frequency power to an end of the electrode so that a standing wave of half wavelength is produced at a straight portion formed by bending back the electrode. In this case, frequency (f) of the high frequency power at this time is determined by $f = (c / \sqrt{\epsilon_p}) / 2L_1$, where c is the speed of light, L_1 is the length of the straight portion formed by bending back the electrode, and ϵ_p is the relative dielectric constant of plasma produced around the electrode.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, the frequency of the high frequency power is changed according to plasma parameters around the electrode.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, a plasma CVD processing is performed for depositing a film with a solar cell function on a large area substrate within the vacuum processing chamber.

In the above plasma processing apparatus, the length L1 of the electrode is preferred to be more than 0.8 meter.

The plasma processing method of the present invention is the processing method executed in the plasma processing apparatus

having an electrode of an inductive coupling type placed within a vacuum processing chamber, and the plasma processing method is characterized in that the electrode is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion, a total length of the electrode is determined to be a natural number times of a half of an excitation wavelength, a high frequency power is supplied to end of the electrode, a node of a standing wave produced in the electrode is consistent with a bending back point, and the standing wave makes density distribution of plasma around the electrode to be uniform.

The plasma processing method of the present invention is the method executed in a plasma processing apparatus comprising an electrode of an inductive coupling type in a vacuum processing chamber, and the electrode is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion to be U-shaped, and a plasma discharge is produced around the electrode by supplying a high frequency power to an end of the electrode so that a standing wave of half wavelength is produced at a straight portion formed by bending back the electrode.

In the above plasma processing method, frequency (f) of the high frequency power at this time is determined by $f = (c / \sqrt{\epsilon_p}) / 2L_1$, where c is the speed of light, L_1 is the length of the straight portion formed by bending back the electrode, and ϵ_p is the relative dielectric constant of plasma produced around the electrode.

In the above plasma processing method, the frequency of the high frequency power is changed according to plasma parameters

around the electrode.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a front view of an electrode showing the internal structure of a plasma processing apparatus according to a basic embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a side view of the inside of the basic embodiment.

Fig. 3 is a front view of an electrode showing the internal structure of another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 4 is a front view of an electrode showing the internal structure of another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 5 is a side view of the inside of the above other embodiment.

Fig. 6 is a view of an example of the mechanism for conveying a substrate.

Fig. 7 is a side view of the internal structure of another embodiment of the present invention.

Best Mode for Carrying out the Invention

The preferred embodiments of the present invention will be described next with reference to the attached drawings.

The basic embodiment of the present invention will be explained first with reference to Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. The plasma processing apparatus according to this embodiment is, for example, an inductive coupling type plasma CVD apparatus for depositing a thin film having the function of a solar cell on a substrate.

The film-deposition chamber 11 is a reactor in which a film

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is deposited or grown on a substrate conveyed inside by plasma CVD and is able to be set to required vacuum conditions. The film-deposition chamber 11 has a single electrode 12 arranged in a vertical standing state, for example. The electrode 12 is supplied with high frequency power as explained later through its one end. This electrode 12 has the function of an antenna for supplying the high frequency electric power to the film-deposition chamber 11. The electrode 12 is preferably formed by a conductive wire (conductive line-shaped member), which has a requisite length and diameter with relation to the frequency of the supplied high frequency power, bent back at its central portion (bent back point) so as to be in one plane and thereby being given a substantially U-shape when seen from the front view. The electrode 12 has a bent back portion with a curved shape and two straight portions to be substantially parallel.

In this embodiment, for example, the electrode 12 is arranged to be vertical with the curved bent portion at the top and the open ends at the bottom. Note that it is also possible to arrange it with the curved bent portion at the bottom and the open ends at the top. The structure supporting the electrode is not illustrated, but any support structure can be employed.

By bending the conductive wire into two, a U-shaped electrode 12 is formed, and the half length is shown by L3 in the figure as the length between the center point 12a and the ends. The portion of the length L3 is the length of a straight portion formed by bending back the electrode 12 (hereinafter referred to as "the bent back straight portion") and is the portion

In the electrode 12, the high frequency power is supplied to the end 12b. A high frequency generator or power source 13 supplying the high frequency power is provided at the outside of the film-deposition chamber 11. The feeder 14 from the high frequency generator 13 is led through a connection part 15 provided at the film-deposition chamber 11 into the inside of the film-deposition chamber 11 and connected to the end 12b of the electrode 12. By this, the high frequency power is supplied to the electrode 12. The connection part 15 has a built-in feed-through structure by which the feeder passes through the wall of the film-deposition chamber 11. The end 12b of the electrode 12 serves as the feeding point.

The other end 12c of the electrode 12 is electrically connected to the film-deposition chamber 11. The film-deposition chamber 11 is made of a conductive member (metal member) and is maintained at the ground potential by being grounded. Therefore, the other end 12c of the electrode 12 is grounded. The other line 13a of the high frequency generator 13 is grounded.

The two ends of the U-shaped electrode 12 are supplied by the high frequency generator 13 with a high frequency power of a frequency higher than the conventionally used high frequency power (for example, 13.56 MHz). The high frequency power used here is a high frequency power having the frequency of 60 MHz or more, for example. In the case of the present embodiment, however, the frequency of the high frequency power supplied to the electrode 12 is determined by a specific method, explained

later, in consideration of the plasma parameters around the electrode 12.

A single backing plate 16 is, for example, arranged in a state parallel to the plane containing the electrode 12 at one side of the electrode 12. Also, for example, four disk-shaped substrates 17 are arranged on the surface of the backing plate 16 facing the electrode. The backing plate 16 has the function of a substrate holder with a built-in heater. Also, the four substrates 17 are arranged on the backing plate 16 along the longitudinal direction of the U-shaped electrode 12. As shown in Fig. 1, in this embodiment, the four substrates 17 are placed to exist corresponding to the position of the space between the two straight portions of the U-shaped electrode 12.

The plasma CVD apparatus according to the present embodiment uses the inductive coupling type electrode, so unlike a parallel plate type electrode, the above backing plate is not necessarily essential. Use of the backing plate is however preferable to improve the uniformity of the substrate temperature and to shield the heater panel from the electromagnetic field. Note that in the plasma CVD apparatus shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, for convenience in explanation, the illustrations of the source gas feed mechanism, the vacuum evacuation mechanism (vacuum pump), the substrate holder, the detailed structure of the substrate heating mechanism, the substrate cooling mechanism, etc. are omitted.

The conductive wire used for the electrode 12 is for example rod-shaped and is made from a metal material such as stainless

steel or aluminum. When the electrode 12 is rod-shaped, its diameter is for example at least 5 mm. In Fig. 1, the relationship between the length of the straight portions L1 formed by bending back the conductive wire into two and the width between the two bent back portions L2 is drawn with the length L2 shown exaggerated larger than it actually is for convenience in the explanation. As an actual preferable embodiment, L1 is for example 75 cm to 2.0 m and L2 is for example about 8 cm. Therefore, the degree of curvature of the upper bent portion of the actual electrode 12 is also not as large as illustrated. In Fig. 1, as the lengths of the bent back portions of the electrode, the length L1 of the straight portion and the length L3 including half of the bent portion are shown, but the bent portion is considerably smaller than the straight portions in length, so the length L1 and the length L3 may be considered to be substantially the same in practice.

The length L1, in practice, is determined in accordance with the size of the substrate on which the film is to be deposited and is set as the length necessary for generating a standing wave, so is determined by the relation with the frequency of the high frequency power supplied. For example, when the frequency is 120 MHz, L1 becomes 1.25 m.

In principle, the length L1 (or length L3) of the bent back straight portions in the electrode 12 is found by the relationship of

$$L1 = c/2f = \lambda/2 \text{ (or } f = c/2L1) \quad \cdots(1)$$

where f is the frequency of the high frequency power supplied,

c is the speed of light, and λ is the wavelength. According to this relationship if the size (dimensions etc.) of the electrode is determined in relation to the substrate (glass etc.), the frequency of the high frequency power supplied to the electrode is determined. Conversely, if the frequency of the high frequency power is determined, the dimensions etc. of the electrode are determined.

According to the above relationship (1), L1 becomes substantially equal to half of the wavelength of the high frequency power, while the total length L0 (=2L1) of the electrode 12 becomes substantially λ .

If the frequency becomes smaller than 120 MHz, the length L1 becomes larger than 1.25 m and the electrode cannot be provided inside the film-deposition chamber 11 in some cases. In such a case, for example, it is possible to reduce the length L1 by adding a coaxial cable structure to the ends of the electrode in order to provide a delayed wave structure relating to the electromagnetic wave. L1 is preferably set to a range of 75 cm to 1.25 m by doing this as explained above. The lengths L1 and L2 may be freely changed in accordance with the objective.

According to the electrode 12 having the above shape, if a high frequency power is supplied from the high frequency generator 13, standing waves with half of the wavelength can be formed at the straight portions formed by bending back the electrode, that is, the two straight portions having the length L1. The standing wave formed on the electrode is controlled so as to produce the antinodes of the standing wave at the central

part of each of the two straight portions and the node at the center point 12a which is the bent back point.

In other words, the shape and dimensions of the electrode 12 is designed and the frequency of the high frequency power supplied to the electrode 12 is determined so that the standing waves are positively created having, for example, one antinode at each of the two parallel straight portions of the electrode 12. Further, when supplying the high frequency power from the high frequency power generator 13 to the U-shaped electrode 12, one end 12b is made to be the feeding point and the other end 12c is connected to the ground. By doing this, the standing wave of one wavelength is generated on the electrode 12 with controlled standing waves generated at the two straight portions of the electrode 12. In the standing waves of the half wavelength generated at each of the two straight portions of the U-shaped electrode 12, their antinodes are consistent in their positions and they mutually intensifies at the region between the straight portions. As a result, plasma with a uniform density is generated in the region between the two straight portions of the electrode 12 and in the surrounding regions.

As explained above, by the film-deposition chamber 11 provided with the electrode 12, when the inside of the film-deposition chamber 11 is evacuated to a required vacuum state by the vacuum pump, filled with a source gas etc. and a high frequency power of for example 100 MHz is fed through the end 12b to the electrode 12, controlled standing waves are produced at the two straight portions and plasma 18 having a uniform density

is generated in the space surrounding the U-shaped electrode 12. A film is deposited on the four disk-shaped substrates 17 provided on the backing plate 16 by the resultant plasma CVD action. The standing wave is formed at each of the halves of the electrode 12 from the center point 12a, that is, the above-mentioned two straight portions. The standing waves control the plasma 18 to achieve a good distribution of the plasma. In particular, as mentioned above, the electrode 12 is designed so that the standing waves with half wavelength produced at the two straight portions are strengthened, so there is no fall in the density of the plasma 18 produced in the space surrounding the electrode 12 and the plasma 18 is controlled in state to the preferable distribution of density.

Note that the number of the antinodes at each of the two bent back straight portions of the electrode 12 is not necessarily limited to one. For example, it is possible to produce the standing waves having plural antinodes by supplying the high frequency power with the frequency higher than 100 MHz to the electrode 12 with above-mentioned dimensions. In this case, the relationship between the total length of the electrode 12 and the wavelength of the supplied high frequency power used for the excitation, is maintained, so that the total length of the electrode is a natural number times of the half of the excitation wavelength, and a node is formed at the bent back point of the U-shaped electrode 12.

As the relationship between the total length of the electrode and the wavelength of the supplied high frequency, by

selecting the wavelength to form a standing wave at the bent back straight portions of the electrode 12 as mentioned above, a strong electromagnetic field strength can be generated in the region surrounding the electrode functioning as the antenna. If a discharge frequency becomes different from the designed one, a traveling wave from the feeding point of the electrode and a reflecting wave returned from the grounding point cancel each other on the electrode, and consequently effective electromagnetic field can not be produced around the electrode. This matter can be experimentally observed as a phenomenon that the electric discharge does not happen without giving the specific relationship between the length of the electrode (the length of the antenna) and the wavelength of the excitation high frequency.

Especially, if the total length of the electrode is equal to one wavelength, the node is made at the feeding point, the bent back point or the grounding point, and the electromagnetic field having the strength not being zero is produced at the remaining portions. Therefore, by making use of the electromagnetic field not being zero, plasma is generated and uniform film deposition can be performed around the center of the straight portions of the electrode.

Further, in the above structure, the bent portion of the U-shaped electrode 12 does not have to be exactly a curved shape and it may be bent sharply or in an angled shape. Also, the two straight portions of the electrode 12 are unnecessary to be strictly parallel. The shape of the electrode may be of V-shaped,

for example, instead of the U-shaped one.

Further, it is possible to make the electrode having a shape similar to the U-shaped one as a whole by arranging the two different straight conductors in parallel and coupling the ends of them with another coupling member. That is, it is possible to form the electrode 12 by making the U-shape with the combination of some conductors.

Also, in the above structure, although the electrode 12 is placed in the vertical standing state to be toward a vertical direction, it may be placed in a lateral state to be toward a horizontal direction. In this case, the backing plate and the substrate are also arranged in the lateral state of the horizontal direction.

According to the above embodiment, since an inductive coupling type electrode is used, there is the advantage that the plasma density can easily be raised compared with a capacitive coupling type electrode. Further, by making the electrode U-shaped and using one of the ends of the electrode as the feeding point, due to the interaction of the standing waves produced at the two bent back straight portions, the plasma is strengthened and the density of the plasma can be kept from becoming nonuniform.

Further, according to the above embodiment, it is possible to manufacture the electrode more inexpensively than a parallel plate type electrode and the electrode is suited to depositing a film on a large area substrate.

When using a high frequency power of 100 MHz for example, the wavelength λ of the high frequency power is 3 m. Therefore,

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the size of the electrode 12 becomes about 150 cm (length) x 12 cm (width), while the area effective for depositing a film becomes 120 cm x 10 cm or so. In Fig. 1 and the like, disk-shaped substrates were drawn as the objects on which the film is to be deposited, but the plasma CVD apparatus of the present embodiment is more suited to depositing a film on rectangular substrates. Further, it is also suited to form films on not only stationary objects, but also on large-area moving substrates. By the use of the above internal electrode type plasma CVD apparatus with high frequency power, the ion bombardment on the depositing film is reduced, good film characteristics can be obtained, and a large area, high quality film can be formed.

Next, the practical conditions of the basic method of designing the internal electrode explained above will be considered.

The following modifications may be considered in the electrode design (antenna design) in view of the practical conditions. If the high frequency power is given from the high frequency generator 13 to the electrode 12, an electric discharge occurs and plasma is produced around the electrode 12 when an discharge gas is introduced into the film-deposition chamber 11 and the requisite vacuum state and other conditions are met. If plasma is produced around the electrode 12, the value of the relative dielectric constant of the surrounding space as determined by the initial basic electrode design (relative dielectric constant ϵ_r at free space) becomes different. As a result, while a standing wave of half the wavelength was supposed

to be produced at the portion of half the length of the electrode in relation with the length of the electrode, this design no longer holds true. Therefore, when dimensional conditions of the electrode 12 are given, the occurrence of the discharge around the electrode 12 after supplying the high frequency power should be envisioned and the frequency of the high frequency power determined envisioning plasma parameters.

If the discharge occurs around the electrode 12 and plasma is generated, the relative dielectric constant of the space around the electrode 12 is no longer 1. Therefore, the frequency of the high frequency power supplied to the electrode 12 is determined in consideration of the discharge conditions around the electrode 12. That is, if the relative dielectric constant of the plasma around the electrode 12 is ϵ_p , the frequency f is determined by $(c/\sqrt{\epsilon_p})/2L1 \cdots (2)$. Note that the relative dielectric constant ϵ_p is given by the formula: $\epsilon_p = 1 - \omega_p^2 / (\omega - j\nu) \cdots (3)$. Here, ω_p is the plasma frequency determined by the electron density, ω is the discharge frequency, and ν is the collision cross section determined by the discharge pressure. The ϵ_p of the above formula (2) is the value of the real part of formula (2) and is not necessarily limited to 1 or more.

Since the dielectric constant of the plasma differs depending on the discharge conditions, the determination of the frequency is extremely difficult. Therefore, in practice, the optimal discharge frequency is determined by experiments.

Another embodiment of the present invention will be explained next with reference to Fig. 3. Fig. 3 is a view similar

to the above-mentioned Fig. 1. In Fig. 3, elements substantially the same as elements explained with reference to Fig. 1 are assigned the same reference numerals. In this embodiment, an inductive coupling type plasma CVD apparatus of the internal electrode type provided with electrodes having a configuration suitable for depositing a film on a larger sized rectangular substrate 21 is shown. The rectangular substrate 21 has a large area and is preferably a glass substrate on which a film of amorphous silicon is deposited for used as a solar cell. Plasma generating area is set over a broad area to face the film-deposition surface of this large area large-sized rectangular substrate 21, and therefore, the portion relating to the electrode is provided with five electrodes which are same as the above-mentioned U-shaped electrode 12. The five electrodes 22A, 22B, 22C, 22D and 22E are arranged to be included in a single plane parallel to the film-deposition surface of the rectangular substrate 21, which is vertical for example, and are provided in a line so that their straight portions are parallel with each other and preferably at equal intervals. In the electrode unit comprised by the electrodes 22A to 22E, the electrodes are arranged with their bent portions at the top and the ends at the bottom. Each of the electrodes 22A to 22E is secured to the bottom wall of the film-deposition chamber 11. One end of each of the electrodes is provided with a connection portion 15, while the other end is connected to the film-deposition chamber 11 so as to be grounded. Further, the film-deposition chamber 11 shown in Fig. 3 is formed to be larger than the film-deposition chamber

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In the configuration shown in Fig. 3, the five electrodes 22A to 22E are separately attached to the film-deposition chamber 11, but the electrodes array is configured so that the standing waves are generated at the two parallel straight portions of each of the electrodes as mentioned above.

Each of the five electrodes 22A to 22E is supplied through its connection portion 15 with the high frequency power having a predetermined frequency from the single high frequency generator 13 provided at the outside of the film-deposition chamber 11 keeping the same phase relationship. The method of determination of the frequency of the high frequency power supplied is as explained in the previous embodiment, and the frequency is determined in consideration of the discharge conditions. The high frequency power supplied from the high frequency power generator 13 to each of the electrodes 22A to 22E is set so that the controlled standing waves are produced at the straight portions of each of the electrodes.

The standing waves produced at the straight portions of the electrodes 22A to 22E are, as explained above, is controlled so that the plasma density of the space around the electrodes become uniform.

The above technical contents will be explained concretely. In Fig. 3, the electrode 22C is paid attention. In the electrode array, the power-supplied side of the straight portion of the

electrode 22C is adjacent to the grounded side of the straight portion of the electrode 22B at the left side, and the grounded side of the straight portion of the electrode 22C is adjacent to the power-supplied side of the straight portion of the electrode 22D at right side. Watching only the electrode 22C, the vectors' direction of the electromagnetic field is reversed in a phase aspect between the power-supplied and the grounded straight portions in the electrode 22C. The electromagnetic field in the region between the power-supplied and the grounded straight portions in the electrode 22C is made stronger in its density by mutual action. As to the outsides of the power-supplied and the grounded straight portions of the electrode 22C, based on the relationship of the adjacent electrodes 22B and 22D and the supply of the high frequency power to the electrodes 22B and 22D, whose phase is identical to that of the high frequency power supplied to the electrode 22C, the same relationship of strengthening the electromagnetic field is also made in the respective regions between the power-supplied side straight portion of the electrode 22C and the grounded side straight portion of the electrode 22B, and between the grounded side straight portion of the electrode 22C and the power-supplied side straight portion of the electrode 22D. Thereby, the plasma of uniform density is generated in each of those regions. The above-mentioned characteristics are realized in the every one of electrodes 22A to 22E.

Therefore, in the space in front of the film -deposition surface of the rectangular substrate 21, no unevenness of

intensity of the electromagnetic field is produced, plasma is generated with a uniform distribution of density, and a film of a uniform thickness is deposited on the large-area rectangular substrate 21. By controlling the standing waves generated at the electrodes to the desired states as mentioned above, the uniformity of film thickness can be improved.

In the above embodiment, the number of electrodes may be freely set in accordance with the size of the substrate on which the film is being deposited. Further, while use of a single high frequency generator is preferable, plural generators may also be used.

Next, further, another embodiment of the present invention will be explained with reference to Fig. 4 and Fig. 5. In these figures, elements substantially the same as elements explained with reference to the previous embodiments are assigned the same reference numerals. In this embodiment, three-layered electrode arrays 33, 34 and 35, each comprised of three electrodes 32A, 32B and 32C, are provided in a stratified configuration at predetermined intervals from each other. The individual electrodes 32A to 32C are configured in the same way as the electrode 12 explained in the above-mentioned basic embodiment. In each of the three-layered electrode arrays 33 to 35, the electrodes 32A to 32C are arranged to be contained at equal intervals in the same vertical plane. Further, the three electrode arrays 33 to 35 are arranged so that the planes they form are parallel. Rectangular substrates 31 are arranged at the two sides of each of the electrode arrays 33 to 35 so that their

film-deposition surfaces are parallel to the planes formed by the electrode arrays. The rectangular substrates 31 are here glass substrates. Further, as shown in Fig. 5, heaters 36 are arranged at the outside of the outermost rectangular substrates in the film-deposition chamber 11. The heaters 36 hold the rectangular substrates 31 at a predetermined temperature. The film-deposition chamber 11 is grounded.

In the above, each of the electrodes 32A to 32C of the electrode arrays 33 to 35 is supplied with the high frequency power from the single high frequency generator through the connection portion 15. The frequency of the high frequency power supplied to each electrode is, in the same way as explained in the above embodiments, determined considering the plasma parameters around the electrodes. As explained above, the controlled standing waves are produced at each of the electrodes 32A to 32C of the electrode arrays 33 to 35. Uniform plasma is produced at the two sides of each of the electrodes 32A to 32C of the electrode arrays 33 to 35 when the film-deposition chamber 11 is held in the required vacuum state and source gas etc. is introduced. A film is deposited on the film-deposition surfaces of the six rectangular substrates 31 based on the plasma CVD action using the high frequency power (for example, RF). Further, in the configuration of this embodiment, since the electrodes are inductive coupling types, no backing plates are required for holding the rectangular substrates 31 at the ground potential. The same is true of the case of the embodiment of the configuration shown in Fig. 3. In Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, only the substrates 31

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were shown, but in practice the substrates 31 are held by support frames. The support frames have window-frame shaped structures.

Fig. 6 shows a window-frame shaped support frame 37 that sets and supports two substrates 31. A substrate conveying mechanism 38 is provided at the bottom of the support frame 37 and is designed to move the substrates 31 on a guide path. The substrates 31 are conveyed in a direction vertical to the paper surface in Fig. 5 or Fig. 6.

Since the U-shaped electrode is shaped with the feeding end and ground end positioned in the same plane and a plurality of U-shaped electrodes can be arranged so as to be in the same plane as well, a multi-region (or zone) deposition device can be easily realized by utilizing a layered or stratified structure of electrodes arranged at predetermined intervals as shown in Fig. 5. By enabling the multi-region film deposition in this way, films can be formed on a plurality of substrates simultaneously and the throughput of film deposition can be improved. If utilizing the layered structure, further, the ratio of the surface area of the film-deposition surfaces of the rectangular substrates to the volume inside the film-deposition chamber becomes larger, so escape of heat can be suppressed and the power consumption can be suppressed.

Further, according to the above embodiment, since the backing plates of the substrates on which films are to be deposited can be omitted, the cost of the power used for raising the temperature of the backing plates, the cost of the cooling water required for cooling the backing plates, the running costs

Fig. 7 shows another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, a structure is shown where the U-shaped electrodes of the present invention are provided in the plasma CVD apparatus of the type using substrate carriers for conveyance. The part of the structure relating to the U-shaped electrodes is substantially the same as the structure shown in Fig. 5. Therefore, in Fig. 7, elements substantially the same as the elements shown in Fig. 5 are assigned the same reference numerals. In this embodiment, a substrate conveyance mechanism 42 provided with a substrate support mechanism 41 is provided at the bottom of the film-deposition chamber 11. Therefore, electrode arrays 33 to 35 having the above three-layered structure are arranged attached to the top wall of the film-deposition chamber 11 and hanging down vertically in the film-deposition chamber 11. The rest of the structure is the same as that explained in Fig. 5. The plurality of substrates 31 supported by the substrate support mechanism 41 are conveyed in a direction vertical to the paper surface in Fig. 7 by the substrate conveyance mechanism 42 after the films are finished being formed on them.

In this embodiment as well, it is possible to form a film

simultaneously on a plurality of substrates by multi-region deposition and there is no need to provide the backing plates for the substrates on which the films are to be formed, so the effects explained with respect to the above embodiments are also exhibited.

In the above-mentioned embodiments, the bent portions and ends of the electrodes may be provided with covers formed by a dielectric (insulator) to cover them. The covers function as electromagnetic shields blocking the electromagnetic field from the electrode. The covers may also be given the function of elements for adjusting the impedance of the electrode. The covers may for example be given a coaxial cable structure.

In the above-mentioned embodiments, the total length of the U-shaped electrode was set to be equal to the excitation wavelength (λ), but a similar action can be obtained by an electrode having a general bent back shape where the total length of the electrode is made natural number (a whole) times of a half of the excitation wavelength of the high frequency power supplied if in this case supplying a high frequency power from the end of the electrode and making the node of the standing wave produced at the electrode match with the bent back point of the electrode.

While the invention has been described with reference to specific embodiment chosen for purpose of illustration, it should be apparent that numerous modifications could be made thereto by those skilled in the art without departing from the basic concept and scope of the invention.

Industrial Applicability

As mentioned above, the internal electrode type plasma processing apparatus and method according to the present invention is suited to deposit the film onto the large area substrate, and is useful of making the solar cells by depositing the amorphous silicon thin film on the large substrates, for example.

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CLAIMS

1. In a plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type, which is provided with an inductive coupling type electrode in a vacuum processing chamber, the plasma processing apparatus characterized in that:

said electrode is formed so that a total length of said electrode is substantially equal to an excitation wavelength, one end of said electrode is grounded and another end thereof is connected to a high frequency power source, and a standing wave of one wavelength is produced along said electrode when said high frequency power source supplies a high frequency power to said electrode; and

a node of said standing wave produced along said electrode is formed at a central portion of said electrode, and an antinode of said standing wave is formed on both portions respectively corresponding to a half of said electrode, which existing at both sides of said center point.

2. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that said electrode is formed to be U-shaped by bending it back at said central portion, and each of the half portions of said electrode corresponds to a straight portion, and both of the half portions are arranged in parallel.

3. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that a length of the half portion of said electrode is substantially equal to a

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half of the wavelength of said high frequency power.

4. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 1, characterized in that a plurality of said electrodes are arranged to make a stratified structure comprising a plurality of layers within said vacuum processing chamber, a plurality of film depositing regions are produced using a space between said electrodes included in said plurality of layers, and film deposition on a substrate is performed in each of said plurality of film depositing regions.

5. In a plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type, which is provided with an inductive coupling type electrode in a vacuum processing chamber, the plasma processing apparatus characterized in that:

said electrode is formed so that a total length of said electrode is determined to natural number times of a half of an excitation wavelength, one end of said electrode is grounded and another end thereof is connected to a high frequency power source, and standing waves are produced along said electrode when said high frequency power source supplies a high frequency to said electrode; and

a node of said standing waves produced along said electrode is formed at a central portion of said electrode, and at least one antinode of said standing waves is formed on both portions respectively corresponding to a half of said electrode, which existing at both sides of said center point.

6. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 5, characterized in that said electrode

is formed to be U-shaped by bending it back at said central portion, and each of the half portions of said electrode is a straight portion, both of the half portions are arranged in parallel, and said node of said standing wave is consistent with a bending back point.

7. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 5, characterized in that a plurality of said electrodes are arranged to make a stratified structure comprising a plurality of layers within said vacuum processing chamber, a plurality of film depositing regions are produced using a space between said electrodes included in said plurality of layers, and film deposition on a substrate is performed in each of said plurality of film depositing regions.

8. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type, characterized by:

comprising a plurality of electrodes of an inductive coupling type in a vacuum processing chamber; wherein

each of said plurality of electrodes is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion to be U-shaped, a straight portions formed by said bending back are parallel and are arranged to be in one plane and further one end of each of said electrodes is grounded and another end thereof is connected to a high frequency power source,

said plurality of electrodes having a positional parallel relationship are placed so that a straight portion at a power supplying side is adjacent to a straight portion at a grounded side,

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high frequency powers respectively supplied into end of said straight portions of power supplying side for said plurality of electrodes are in phase.

9. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 8, characterized in that a length of the straight portion formed by bending back in the plurality of electrodes is determined to produce an antinode of a standing wave on said straight portion.

10. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 9, characterized in that some of said electrodes arranged to be in one plane is configured as an electrode array, a plurality of the electrode arrays are placed as a stratified structure within said vacuum processing chamber, a plurality of film depositing regions are produced using a space between said electrode arrays of plural layers, and film deposition on a substrate is performed in each of said plurality of film depositing regions.

11. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type, characterized by:

comprising a electrodes of an inductive coupling type in a vacuum processing chamber; wherein

said electrodes is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion to be U-shaped,

a plasma discharge is produced around said electrode by supplying a high frequency power to an end of said electrode so that a standing wave of half wavelength is produced at a straight portion formed by bending back said electrode, and

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frequency (f) of said high frequency power at this time is determined by

$$f=(c/\sqrt{\epsilon_p})/2L1$$

where c is the speed of light, L1 is the length of the straight portion formed by bending back said electrode, and ϵ_p is the relative dielectric constant of plasma produced around said electrode.

12. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 11, characterized in that the frequency of said high frequency power is changed according to plasma parameters around said electrode.

13. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 11, characterized in that a plasma CVD processing is performed for depositing a film with a solar cell function on a large area substrate within said vacuum processing chamber.

14. A plasma processing apparatus of an internal electrode type as set forth in claim 11, characterized in that said length L1 of said electrode is more than 0.8 meter.

15. In a plasma processing apparatus having an electrode of an inductive coupling type placed within a vacuum processing chamber, a plasma processing method characterized in that:

said electrode is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion, a total length of said electrode is determined to be a natural number times of a half of an excitation wavelength, a high frequency power is supplied to end of said electrode, a node of a standing wave produced in said electrode

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is consistent with a bending back point, an antinode of said standing wave is produced in each half portion of said electrode, and said standing wave makes density distribution of plasma around said electrode to be uniform.

16. A plasma processing method as set forth in claim 15, characterizing in that the total length of said electrode is twice as long as a half of an excitation wavelength.

17. In a plasma processing apparatus comprising an electrodes of an inductive coupling type in a vacuum processing chamber, a plasma processing method characterized in that:

said electrodes is formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion to be U-shaped,

a plasma discharge is produced around said electrode by supplying a high frequency power to an end of said electrode so that a standing wave of half wavelength is produced at a straight portion formed by bending back said electrode, and

frequency (f) of said high frequency power at this time is determined by

$$f = (c / \sqrt{\epsilon_p}) / 2L_1$$

where c is the speed of light, L₁ is the length of the straight portion formed by bending back said electrode, and ϵ_p is the relative dielectric constant of plasma produced around said electrode.

18. A plasma processing method as set forth in claim 17, characterized in that the frequency of said high frequency power is changed according to plasma parameters around said electrode.

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A plasma processing apparatus is of an internal electrode type, and an inductive coupling type electrode arranged facing a substrate 17 has a shape formed by bending back a conductor at its central portion. A high frequency power is supplied to an end of the electrode so that a standing wave of half wavelength are produced at straight portions formed by bending back the electrode to make an antinode there, and thus a plasma discharge is generated around the electrode. The controlled standing waves with its antinodes positively generated at the straight portions of the electrode are effectively used. The frequency f of the high frequency power is determined by $f = (c / \sqrt{\epsilon_p}) / 2L_1$, where c is the speed of light, L_1 is the length of the portion formed by bending back the electrode, and ϵ_p is the relative dielectric constant of plasma produced around the electrode. The standing waves are positively used to control distribution of density of the plasma in a good situation, and the configuration of the electrode is designed considering the plasma parameters around the electrode.

FIG. 2

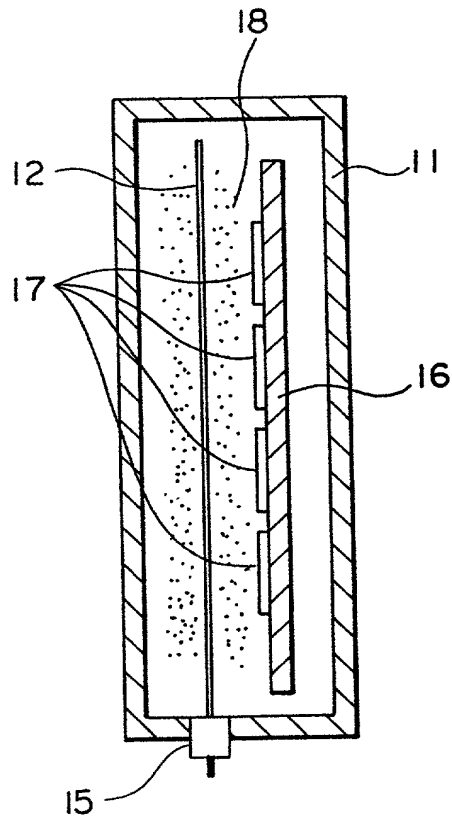


FIG. 3

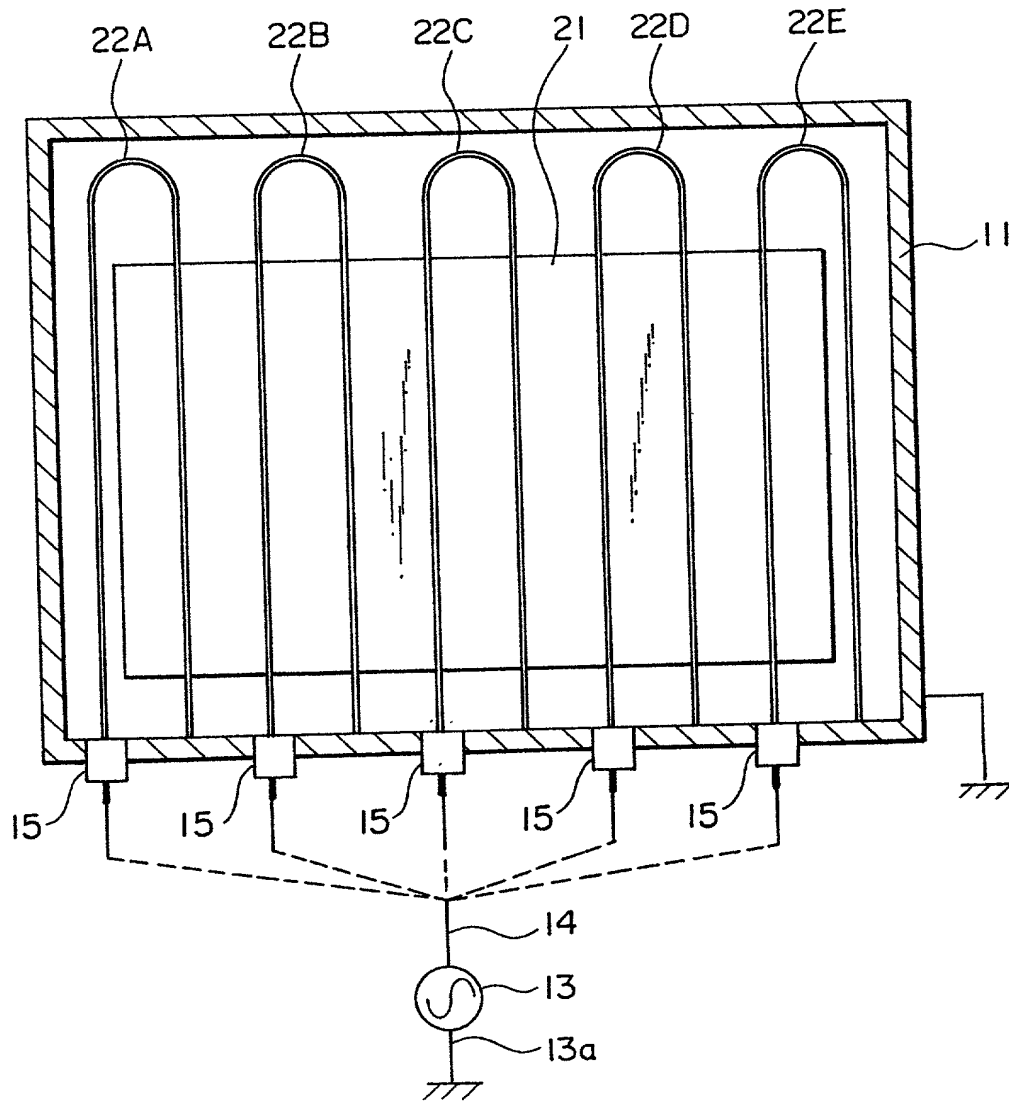


FIG. 4

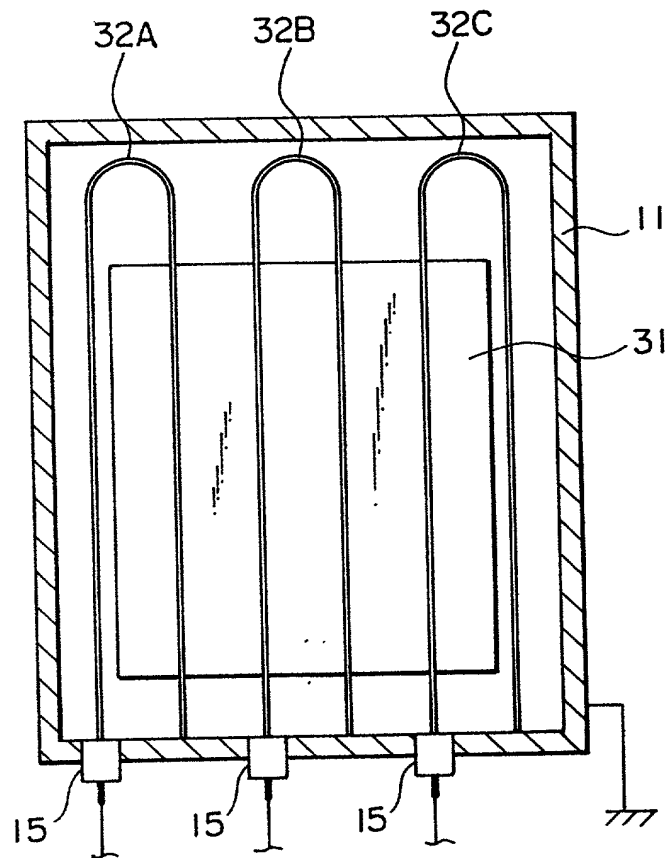


FIG. 5

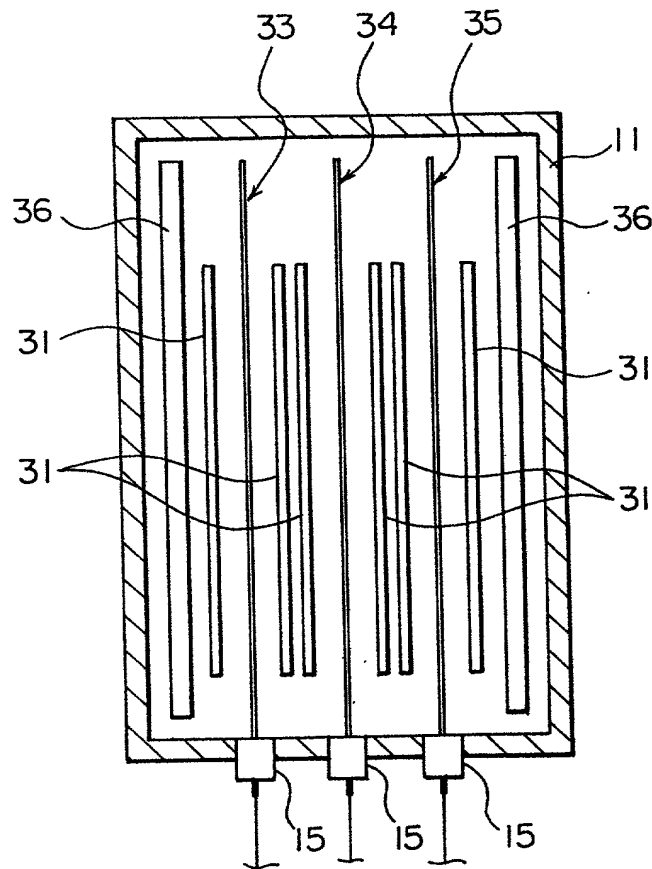


FIG. 6

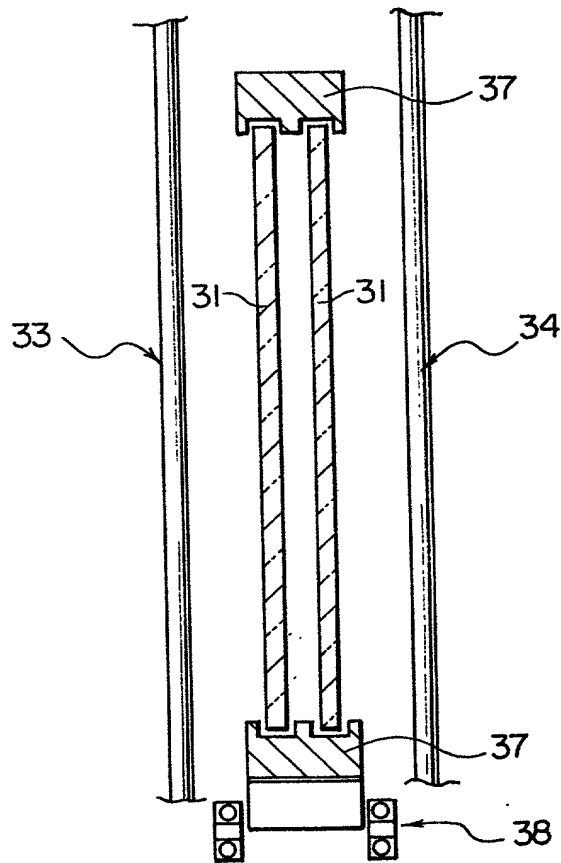
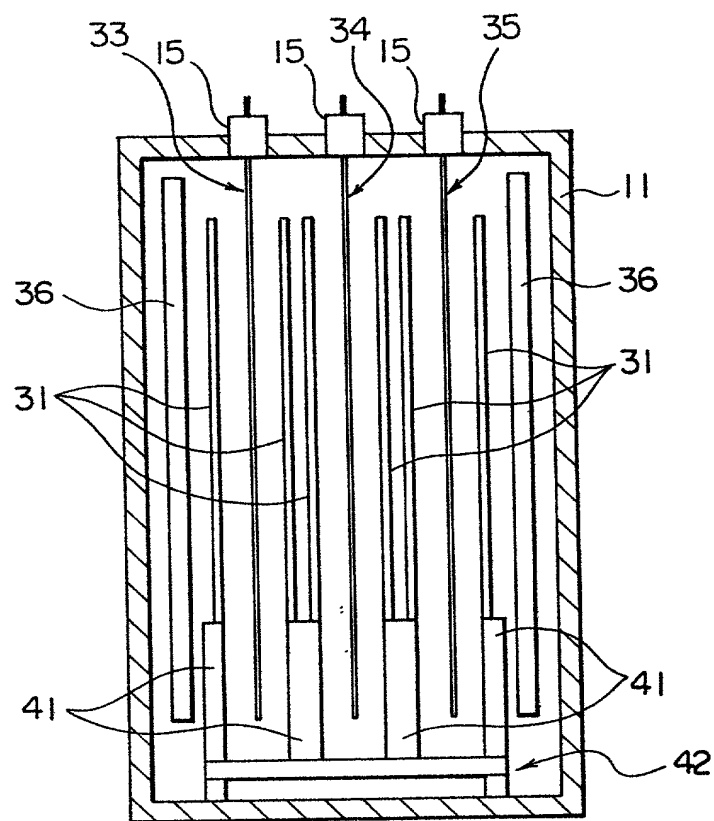


FIG. 7



IF THERE IS MORE THAN ONE INVENTOR USE PAGE 2 AND PLACE AN "X" HERE ☒

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Month Day Year

Residence: _____
City State or Province Country

Citizenship: _____

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(Insert complete mailing address, including country) _____

Note to Inventor: Please sign name on line 2 exactly as it appears in line 1 and insert the actual date of signing on line 3.

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